

21 August 1972

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Your letter of 10 August arrived last week and from it I infer that your past few months have been busy ones. I was intrigued by your account of the difficulties you have encountered and though wryly amused am more than sympathetic. If it is any consolation, these are frustrations encountered by all of us who have toiled in this particular vineyard. Unfortunately, I fear the more research you do, the worse the problem is likely to become. In the process you will probably come to a conclusion to which I certainly subscribe: on matters of recent Vietnamese history, people's certitude of conviction usually runs in roughly inverse proportion to their factual knowledge.

Do not be at all surprised when informants flatly contradict what you had previously accepted as fact; but don't be too shaken either, since sometimes (not always) they will be wrong and your previous views, right. You will also find that informants often flatly contradict each other and also -- with bland, unabashed cheerfulness -- flatly contradict themselves.

Incidentally, I was quite interested in the allegation by one of the people you interviewed that he had been Le Duan's escort officer in Bentre in 1958. Unless he was a year or two off in his alleged recollection, this is quite improbable. The weight of available evidence strongly (and, to my mind, persuasively) suggests that Le Duan was recalled to Hanoi in late 1956 or early 1957 to take over Truong Chinh's duties as Party First Secretary. (Ho, as you certainly know, took the title when Truong Chinh was forced to step down to atone for the excesses of his "Land Reform" program, but Le Duan took over the actual responsibilities and got the title three years later, in 1960.)

If this scenario is approximately accurate, it is unlikely that Le Duan would have gone back to South Vietnam (particularly down as far as the Delta) in 1958, partly because he would have been too busy in Hanoi setting the Party's house in order (plus, of course, consolidating his own position therein) and partly because the Party would have had little need and less wish to risk its new de facto First Secretary in hostile territory not under Party control.

I look forward to hearing more about your research and plans when you get to Washington. Please give me a call either at my home

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Sincerely yours,

George A. Carver, Jr.

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